



PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL TRAINING DEFICIENCY AND FUTURE TRANSFORMATION FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AMONGST STUDENTS-ATHLETES OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Psychological training of student-athletes is mostly given a less professional approach among all the training that student-athletes undergo nowadays and this can have an effect on the future transformation and poverty eradication. This study investigated the psychological skill training deficiency and future transformation for poverty eradication amongst student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. One hundred and three (103) student-athletes, male (43) and female (60) from two tertiary institutions across eleven (11) sports were multi-stage sampled for the study. Three (3) research hypotheses were tested and data were collected with the use of a standardized 20-item "Sports Mental Training Questionnaire (SMTDQ)" with Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$. The questionnaire was drawn based on a five-point Likert Rating Scale with "1" standing for "strongly disagree" while "5" stands for "strongly agree". Chi-square and t-tests were used for data analyses. The results indicated that there was a significant level of psychological skill training but recorded no significant differences in the level of sports psychology skill training among the student-athletes by gender and by their tertiary institution. It was recommended that appropriate measure such as contracting a professional sports psychologist to assist in the psychological training of students-athletes on a part-time basis should be employed if there is no resources for full-time service so as to promote the marketability of the student-athletes for their future transformation and by that help their employability and poverty eradication.

Keywords:

Future transformation, Poverty eradication, Psychological skill training deficiency, Student-athletes

Word count: 232

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How to cite: Honawon N. P., Oyekunle A. O., Adesanya A. T., Sunmonu M. S. (2024). Psychological Skill Training Deficiency and Future Transformation for Poverty Eradication Amongst Students-Athletes of Tertiary Institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Educational Perspectives*, 12(3),



Introduction

Every student enrolled in a tertiary institution who decided to showcase his/her psychomotor skills in sports to represent the institution in competitive sports (sponsored by that educational institution) has personal and performance needs to be met which fall under Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (AMHN). AMHN is a psychological theory that posits that human motivation is driven by a hierarchical arrangement of needs. According to Maslow (1943), individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before they can pursue higher-level ones. The hierarchy, from lowest to highest, includes physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943).

The most fundamental needs of any individual including student-athletes according to Abraham Maslow (1943) are physiological, including food, water, shelter, and adequate nutrition. Student-athletes living in poverty may struggle to meet these basic requirements, which can severely hinder their ability to focus on academics and sports. The safety needs encompass physical security, financial stability, and a sense of predictability. Poverty often entails a lack of financial security and can expose individuals to unsafe environments, making it challenging for student-athletes to perform optimally. Social needs refer to a sense of belonging, friendships, and positive interactions with others. Poverty can lead to isolation due to limited resources for social activities, potentially affecting a student-athlete's emotional well-being and support system. Esteem needs encompass self-respect, confidence, and recognition from others. Poverty can undermine self-esteem, as it often comes with stigmatization, feelings of inadequacy, and a lack of recognition for achievements, both in academics and athletics. Self-actualization is the realization of one's potential and the pursuit of personal growth and fulfillment. Poverty can severely limit opportunities for personal development, hindering a student-athlete's ability to reach their full potential in sports and education (Maslow, 1943).

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs underscores the critical importance of poverty eradication and future transformation for student-athletes. Addressing poverty is essential because it lays the foundation for meeting their basic physiological and safety needs, which are prerequisites for them to excel academically and athletically. Furthermore, it facilitates the fulfillment of their social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, enabling them to thrive in all aspects of their lives. Student-athletes must have access to their essential needs, allowing them to maintain good health and well-being, proper nutrition, and a stable living environment which are critical for physical development and athletic performance. They can have a stable economic foundation, reducing stress related to financial insecurity creating an environment where they can focus on education and sports without worrying about basic survival needs, provide resources for them to participate in social activities, fostering a supportive community and enhancing their overall well-being, provide them with the resources and opportunities to build confidence and receive the recognition they deserve, and to have the resources and support needed to reach their full potential in academics and athletics.

On the other hand, for student-athletes to eradicate poverty through sports at any level identified by Maslow, they need to possess the performance skills needed for sports triumph. Sports industries have emerged as platforms for those with psychomotor skills in terms of sports participation either actively or passively to excel and assume careers for survival. To this end, just as it is required from an individual who seeks career prosperity and to end ravaging poverty to possess the needed skills considering their interest, abilities, and capability for such a career,



athletes are correspondingly expected to acquire the necessary skills that will give them an edge among their counterparts while maximizing their potentials in their chosen sports. Student-athletes who see participating in sports as future transformation opportunity to eradicate poverty are expected to go through a holistic training approach which encompasses technical, tactical, and psychological training.

Technical training refers to the specific skills and techniques required for a particular sport. It involves mastering the fundamentals, such as dribbling in basketball or perfecting throw-in skills in football games, etc. to enhance their proficiency, precision, and consistency in executing specific skills and movements, which are essential for competitive success (Garstang & Johnson, 2006). Tactical training focuses on the strategic aspect of the sport, including decision-making, game awareness, understanding team dynamics, studying opponents' strategies, and finding ways to exploit their weaknesses which enables them to understand the flow of the game, exploit opportunities, and respond strategically to the actions of opponents and teammates (Hughes & Franks, 2004). Psychological training encompasses a range of mental skills and strategies that optimize an athlete's performance and mental well-being. This includes techniques for goal-setting, visualization, concentration, and stress management. The importance of psychological training can be explained as follows (Weinberg & Gould, 2014). Each aspect contributes uniquely to an athlete's development, ensuring they have the skills, knowledge, and mental fortitude to succeed in their sport. This well-rounded approach not only enhances their performance but also promotes personal growth, resilience, and overall well-being, which are invaluable assets both in athletics and in life beyond sports

Of all the three training skills that a student-athlete should possess, most sports coaches observe that victory against an opponent with similar physical abilities depends on psychological preparation or psychological skill training level of the student-athletes (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). Research in sports psychology has revealed that mental training facilitates successful performance and enhances athletes' personal well-being (Golby & Wood, 2016; Vealey 2007). Therefore most athletes make additional mental efforts to enhance their performance as a supplement to physical training. Mental training has been founded on the assumption that psychological factors enhance or inhibit physical performance (Behnke, et al., 2019; Vealey 2007). For instance, excessive levels of psychological stress disturb cognitive focus on the task and increase the focus on the self, resulting in a lower level of sport efficacy (Mesagno et al. 2012, Hill et al. 2010). The uniqueness of psychological skill training for student-athletes makes it the decider of their poverty eradication.

Through psychological skill training, student-athletes will learn various mental skills such as, how to set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals (Lauer et al., 2020), learn to mentally rehearse and visualize successful performance scenarios (Cocks, et al., 2014), manage negative thoughts and replace them with positive affirmations (Osborne, Greene, & Immel, 2014), learn techniques to maintain concentration on the task at hand, even in high-pressure situations (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 2018), acquire strategies for managing stress and anxiety, including deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness practices, develop resilience and mental toughness (Dosil, Cremades, & Rivera, 2014), which enables them to persevere through challenges, setbacks, and adversity, stay motivated and aligned with their long-term objectives, even when faced with obstacles or distractions, effective communication skills, conflict resolution, and building positive relationships with coaches,

teammates, and support staff, and assess their performance objectively, set new goals, and make adjustments to their training and mental preparation strategies.

PST is crucial for helping student-athletes maximize their potential in sports and their academic and personal lives. It provides them with a toolkit to navigate their challenges and demands, ultimately contributing to their overall success and well-being. However, as crucial as PST is to a student-athlete, it is mostly neglected and not handled professionally by sports organisations (Semidara, 2012) thereby leading to a lack or insufficiency of psychological skills training programmes for student-athletes. This deficiency could hinder their overall performance and success, both in academics and athletics. By providing better psychological skills training to student-athletes in tertiary institutions, there is potential for significant positive change in their lives, including a potential impact on poverty alleviation. Enhancing their psychological skills will lead to better performance, increased opportunities, and potentially higher income. If the deficiency in psychological skills training is addressed, it can lead to positive transformations in the lives of student-athletes.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant level of psychological skill training for future transformation and poverty eradication among student-athletes in Lagos State.
2. There is no significant differences in the level of sports psychology skill training for future transformation and poverty eradication among the student-athletes in Lagos State by gender.
3. There is no significant differences in the level of sports psychology skill training for future transformation and poverty eradication among the student-athletes in Lagos State by institution.

Method

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study. One hundred and three (103) male (43) and female (60) consented student-athletes from two institutions out of four public universities in the state across ten (10) sports were multi-stage sampled for the study. These participants were admitted students in Lagos State University (LASU) and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED) who represent their respective institutions in competitive sports. They were purposively selected and conveniently sampled from ten sports namely; athletics, badminton, basketball, football, handball, volleyball, table tennis, tennis, judo, and taekwondo. Three (3) research hypotheses were tested and data were collected with the use of a standardized 20-item “Sports Mental Training Questionnaire (SMTDQ)” with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$. The questionnaire was drawn based on a five-point Likert Rating Scale with “1” standing for “strongly disagree” while “5” stands for “strongly agree”. The instrument sought the opinion of the respondents on the foundation, performance, interpersonal, self-talk, and mental imagery skills of the participants. This is to ascertain the level of structured psychological skill training levels that they have attained if they have been exposed to such. The completed copies of questionnaires were collated and analyzed with Chi-square and t-tests were used for data analyses inferential statistic at the 0.05 level of significance using IBM SPSS 20 version.



Results on Analysis of Responses based on 4 Point Modified Likert Rating Scale

Table 1.

Chi square summary table on level of psychological skill training among student-athletes in Lagos State tertiary institutions.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	206.000 ^a	110	.000
Likelihood Ratio	200.261	110	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	93.009	1	.000
Below Average	34		
Average	14		
Above Average	55		
N of Valid Cases	103		

a. 168 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .14.

The Chi-square table above reveals the result of the analysis on the level of psychological skill training amongst student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State. The Pearson chi-square value stood at 206.000^a which is statistically significant as p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05 level of significance with 110 degrees of freedom. This indicates that there is a significant level of psychological skill training among student-athletes in Lagos State tertiary institutions.

Table 2.

T-test Summary on Difference in the Level of Psychological Skill Training among Student-Athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State by Gender.

By Gender	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	t	Sig.
Between Groups	1541.268	1	1541.268	2.185	.142
Within Groups	71229.586	101	705.243		
Total	72770.854	102			

The t-test table above discloses the result of the analysis on the different levels of psychological skill training amongst student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State. The t-test value, 2.185 is statistically not significant as the p-value (0.142) is greater than the 0.05 level of significance with 101 degrees of freedom. This implies that there is no significant difference in the level of sports psychology skill training among the student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State by gender.

**Table 3.**

T-test Summary on Difference in the Level of Psychological Skill Training among Student-Athletes of Tertiary Institutions in Lagos State by Institution

By Institution	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	T	Sig.
Between Groups	.369	1	.369	.001	.982
Within Groups	72636.660	101	719.175		
Total	72637.029	102			

The t-test table above unveils the result of the analysis on the difference level of psychological skill training among student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State by their academic institutions. The t-test value, 0.001 is statistically not significant as p-value (0.982) is greater than 0.05 level of significance with 101 degree of freedom. This explains that there is no significant differences in the level of sports psychology skill training among the student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State by their academic institutions.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the psychological skill training deficiency and future transformation for poverty eradication amongst student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. The result of the study reveals that there is a significant level of psychological skill training among student-athletes of tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria, and that in the two institutions where the study was carried out, there were no significant differences in the level of psychological skill training among student-athletes by their gender and by the institution. This implies that student-athletes in the two institutions of the study manifest similar significant levels of psychological skill training. On percentage, 55 respondents manifest a high level of psychological skills (PS), 14 respondents manifest PS on average while 34 respondents manifest PS on a below-average level.

While there is a general acknowledgment that student-athletes possess inherent psychological skills, it is important to note that not all athletes have the same level of these skills according to the principle of individual differences. The study conducted by Jõesaar, Hristovski, and Kattel (2012) focused on examining the psychological skills and traits of professional golfers, proving that there are potential variations in the PS and traits among individuals in this elite sport. In like manner, Laborde, Dosseville, and Allen's (2016) study delves into individual differences in the "Zone of Optimal Functioning," which is a state of peak performance, and identifies various profiles among athletes. Individual differences were also recorded in psychological skills among elite youth soccer players over time (MacNamara & Collins, 2015). Another study investigates the impact of psychological skills training and mindfulness-based interventions on athletic performance, highlighting potential individual differences (Gross et al., 2018). These studies collectively highlight that athletes possess varying levels of psychological skills, and these differences can significantly impact their performance, motivation, and well-being. While these psychological skills may naturally exist to some extent, professional training and coaching further refine and enhance them. Additionally, formal training can introduce new techniques and strategies that an athlete might not have developed on their own. So, while athletes possess



innate psychological skills, these can be honed and optimized through deliberate training and practice.

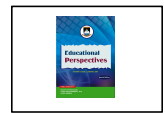
Secondly, the percentage of student-athletes demonstrating low and average psychological skills according to the study is on the high side. The deficiency of psychological skill training will continue to hamper their performance until they are exposed to professionally structured psychological skill training (PSPST). Researches have shown that athletes who have deficiency of psychological training experience lower levels of confidence and self-efficacy which hinder their performance and overall development as athletes, and have difficulty in setting clear and achievable goals (Anstiss, Meijen, & Marcora, 2020; De Pero et al., 2013). Additionally, their motivation levels fluctuate, leading to inconsistency in training and performance. (Weinberg & Gould, 2023), struggle with maintaining focus and concentration during practice and competition which can lead to lapses in performance and missed opportunities (Birrer, & Morgan, 2010). They underutilize techniques like mental imagery and visualization. (Hawkins, 2020; Bastos, et al. 2018), exhibit lower levels of resilience and mental toughness making them struggle to bounce back from setbacks and may be more prone to giving up in challenging situations. Gerber et al., 2018; Gerber et al., 2013), and may be at a higher risk of developing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout (Walton et al., 2021). The demands and pressures of competitive sports can take a toll on an athlete's mental well-being if they do not have the necessary coping mechanisms (Brenner, et al., 2019). These psychological skills training can be powerful tools for enhancing performance, and the absence of training in this area can be a significant deficiency.

Many studies have concluded that athletes who do not receive adequate professionally structured psychological training tend to struggle with performance in high-pressure situations. They may face difficulties in managing stress, maintaining concentration, and dealing with setbacks, all of which can negatively impact their overall performance (Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2022; Cogan, 2019; Osborne, Greene, & Immel, 2014).

To this end, several studies have also demonstrated the positive impact of a structured psychological skills training programme on both performance and psychological development in athletes such as swimmers (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). Another review article provides a comprehensive overview of the benefits of psychological skills training in various sports, emphasizing the importance of formal training (Weinberg & Williams, 2012). Gucciardi et al. (2009) study also supports the notion that structured mental toughness training positively impacts performance in golf, underscoring the value of formal training. These studies provide empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of formal psychological skills training in improving performance across various sports. They emphasize the importance of structured programmes and interventions for student-athletes to develop and apply psychological skills effectively. It is only through this intervention that student-athletes can be sure of future transformation in their choice of sports and demonstrate revived hope of poverty eradication.

Conclusion

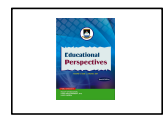
This study concluded that there is a significant level of psychological skill training among the student-athletes with no significant difference by gender and by their tertiary institutions. This necessitates the need for professionally structured psychological skill training to improve the



psychological skill levels of those student-athletes who are not operating at above-average levels in their sports performance.

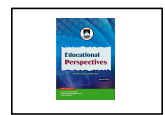
Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that the sports councils or directorate of sports of the tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria employ the service of professional sports psychologists on a part-time if it is not possible on a full-time basis to improve the psychological skills of their student-athletes as that increases those athletes' chances of future transformation for poverty eradication.



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